

SWORN STATEMENT ABOUT TORTURES SUFFERED ON BOARD THE "ESMERALDA",
TRAINING SHIP OF THE CHILEAN NAVY.

EXCISE

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In Israel, Tel Aviv, on April 22, 1976, I, Luis Vega Contreras, Chilean, lawyer, identity card ☒ issued in Valparaiso, state in this sworn statement:

Chile Project (#S199900006)

U.S. Department of State

Release ☒ Excise ☒ Deny ☐ Declass ☐
Exemption(s) ☐ President, Dr. ☐

FIRST: During the Popular Unity Government of Salvador Allende, I served as an attorney for the Ministry of the Interior. As a Government Attorney, I provided legal counsel to the ¹Governors of the Provinces of Valparaiso and Aconcagua. I acted as the Attorney General to the legally elected government in cases which came under the National Security Law (No. 12,927). In this function I processed 596 cases before the Appeals Court of Valparaiso of those who had been accused by the Police, Investigation and Naval Intelligence Services of violating the National Security law. I also served as counsel for the Development Corporation of the Provinces of Valparaiso and Aconcagua. One of the Directors of this Corporation was Admiral José Toribio Merino Castro. ²I was also President of the Industry and Medical Machinery Company, which produced highly technical medical equipment such as artificial kidneys. Admiral Merino was also a Director of this Company. I also provided legal counsel to the Chaquicamata Mining Company in legal suits before the Labor Court of Valparaiso.

SECOND: From November, 1970 to September 10, 1973 and especially during the period when Admiral Jose Toribio Merino Castro served as Governor of Valparaiso, I worked in contact with the A-2, Naval Intelligence Service and with other Naval and Military personnel involved in Intelligence activities. These activities were in relation to my duties under National Internal Security.

THIRD: On September 11, 1973, in spite of the fact that all telephone communication was cut and the whole city patrolled by tanks, and the streets barricaded by sand bags, troops with canon and machine guns, I arrived at my office at the Government House at eight in the morning. The Government House was surrounded by tanks, jeeps with machine guns and marines with their faces blackened. I was not allowed to enter. At the door of the First Naval Zone whose offices were under mine, I met German Valenzuela Eraso, President of the Appellate Court of Valparaiso, some judges, high

Intendants:

One of the members of the Junta

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officials, and Vice-Admiral Rodolfo Vio, Auditor General of the Navy. Each of us asked for an appointment and I was told by Vice-Admiral Adolfo Walbaum, who said that he was now the Governor, to go back home and wait for instructions. I did so.

FOURTH: At 8:20 P. M. on September 11, 1973, Police Commanders Castro and Stange arrived at my home in the National Defense Building, Pudeto Street 351, accompanied by some officers and a large number of troops and detectives, all armed with machine guns and in numerous vehicles. I was told to accompany them and to take my personal effects which I did. They searched my home.

I was placed in a pick-up truck where I found Mr....., retired government official.

We then went to get other people among whom I remember Congressman...and Councilman... We entered the harbor pier at 9:20 P. M. and Commanders Stange and Castro turned us over to the Commander of the ESMERALDA. He and other officials were at attention on the main deck of the ESMERALDA, the training ship of the Navy. There they made us stop in front of the pier where we saw people on the ground or kneeling with their hands behind their heads. A midshipman of Nordic appearance, who I had known to be a member of the fascist-terrorist organization "Patria y Libertad" (Fatherland and Liberty), without saying a word, hit me in the neck with the stock of his rifle. He then hit me again in the right kidney with his gun. From then on, under kicks, blows and amidst the vilest curses we were taken to the Midshipmen's quarters where we saw a sign of sarcastic humor saying "Entrance forbidden, for members only." I was pushed and thrown on the floor where everything was dark and the light bulbs were covered or painted red. The masks that covered some of the sailor's faces had fluorescent paint. I had hardly gotten up when some marines wearing black hoods tripped us and knocked us to the ground. They placed the muzzle of their rifle on the back of my head and a foot on my back. They did this in the midst of infernal screaming, blows and insults. They ripped off my clothes and took away my valuables. I had a thick gold chain with some trinkets attached, and in order to take it they held me by the hair and pulled it off. I still have the scars of their brutality on my neck. They violently stole it from me. Then, naked, they placed me under a high pressure jet of sea water. This lasted for five

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threw me on the ground. My wrists were tied behind my back and my fingers were individually tied. Thus, bound they put me again under the heavy, powerful jet of sea water. The pressure produced an unbearable pain in the head, ears, eyes and lungs. Using lances made from sticks with steel points, they would stab at us to keep us under the water jet.

Later on they threw us on the floor and every fifteen minutes, between kicks and blows from their rifle butts in the so called Midshipmen's quarters, they would place us under the water jet. As I was beaten, they told me that in my home they had found 10 gold bars, food and that they knew that I was in charge of a plot to murder Naval Officers and a leader of the GAP.⁴ During the 72 hours we were not allowed to sleep due to the water jet, the beatings and a head count taken every 15 minutes. The first night there were seven men in the so called Midshipmen's quarters and one woman. I only remember that her name was... and that she had been found with a flier about a feminist meeting that had taken place one week before. I remember she cried for her husband and children.

We were all naked. At one point we were according to the count, men and 72 women. The quarters were divided with a canvas, but the women were naked in their hammocks.

The treatment those sailors gave the women was outrageous. They would squeeze their breasts, buttocks and thighs. We could hear the screams of the women and girls protesting these outrages. I saw...daughter of..., moan and cry every night when they seized her. I saw..., a student, ..., of the University..., and a friend ..., who remained calm and dignified amidst such horror. Every one was stripped and placed under the jet of sea water. There was a marine we called the "Bird of Torture", who would constantly bang on the metal doors to prevent us from sleeping. It was impossible to do so anyway because we constantly heard the yelling that came from the torture chambers where electric shocks were applied, the "telephone",⁵ and other savage tortures took place. They would yell out the names of those who were to be interrogated by the "inspectors".

⁴Special security force to protect President Allende

⁵Form of torture where both ears are hit simultaneously, producing great pain and damage to the eardrums.

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take him out three or four times a night and bring him back half unconscious, and his blood would drip over my back and face. I could not dry the blood because during the days I was on board the training ship ESMERALDA, I was either on my back or facing the floor with my hands always behind my neck. This produced such cramps that it makes it almost impossible to move or walk when one gets up.

On September 13, at about 9 P. M., I was taken to the Officers quarters on deck where there were 9 members of the combined armed Intelligence and police plus an official of the Bureau of Investigations, though I got the impression that he also belonged to the Navy.

On my way to these quarters the individuals that were guarding me told me I would be immediately shot because I was a Communist, a traitor to my country and the Armed Forces. They made me stand up against a wall, they kept quiet for a while. One of them made me close my eyes and then cried "fire". Nothing happened.

I had gone into the quarters bare-foot, with a cloth over my eyes and completely tied up. They made me remove the cloth and the ropes with which they had tied me up. They gave me a blanket so that I could cover myself, coffee and cigarettes. They interrogated me for four hours about several matters related fundamentally to my work as Interior Security, the files and some problems about pending lawsuits. They had no masks on, and they knew that my functions were exclusively legal and that I belonged to no political party.

But when I was leaving this interrogation, those that were taking me out told me, "We know you have lied and that you are a traitor and we have orders to cast you to the bottom of the sea." They had again covered my eyes. They added, "we are going to give you a chose, do you want us to tie your feet with chains or do you prefer to have an anchor attached to your feet." I answered, "an anchor". One of them asked why. I answered "because you have very few and they are very expensive." They took me and placed me under the sea water jet; they held me there for a long time; they almost drowned me. Then they showed me..., an engineer, who was naked and had a skinned back with wounds that had been produced by banging oneself against the steel pillars in the officers'

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electric shocks. He had salt on his wounds, sea salt. I was forced to stand over him and to grind the salt with my feet so that it would seep into the wounds.did not complain and apparently was semi-conscious. I had to do this under the pressure of blows and machine guns.

On September 14, I do not remember the time, I was taken to one of the offices on deck. I could hear the voices of....and They put a plastic helmet on my head and asked me, "Do you know who wears this?" "Yes", I answered, "construction workers and miners". "No" he told me. "The Compañero wears it." I asked "Who is el Compañero?" He answered, "How come you don't know who the Compañero is? Allende, the one who was shot when we took the Moneda (Chilean Presidential Palace). It was taken by our officers and soldiers." This was the first information I had about the death of President Allende. And according to the informant, Salvador Allende had been killed by them.

In Dawson Island I learned what the real circumstances of the tragic death of Salvador Allende, President of Chile. Dr. Salvador Allende had "committed suicide" with over thirty five (35) shots in his body. That time they told me "Allende had resisted and the soldiers and officers that had taken The Moneda room by room, had been forced to kill him when he refused to surrender."

That same day, the 14th, approximately at sun down, the torturers of our prison told us "we are going to behave, you'll do some gymnasium." They started with me and..... As we could hardly get up, we were leaning against some cabinets in order to start doing some exercises, when we heard shots coming from different parts of the city. One of the torturers went on deck and returned saying, "they are going to attack the pier in order to rescue these s. o. b. s", and they started kicking us, hitting us with the butts of their guns, pistols and rubber whips. ^{Sergio} ~~Vicovic~~ was kicked in this way, so that when the International Red Cross arrived at Dawson Island he still had black and blue marks.

The torturers of the midshipmen's quarters told us, "If the Communists get to the Green Door, we'll shoot all of you." I think there was no such shooting. The shots were continuous and they

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came from machine guns or submachine guns, and they were located on the hills. They were constant and never changed positions. If there really had been a confrontation the shooting would have had to be irregular and not a constant one as it was. And it suddenly stopped completely.

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The fear, the screams, the crying of the ladies who were detained next to us cannot be expressed in this declaration. Some of the torturers would say we had to be shot immediately. One could tell they were in a state of hysteria, terror, and cowardness, bordering on mental distress. Some would say our corpses should be dragged through the streets so that the imaginary terrorists would give up.

Approximately an hour later that night new detainees started arriving. They were accused of having been caught throwing empty machine guns on the ground. According to the accused, after the usual procedure of blows and seawater jet, they had been merely

Walking in the streets on their way home. They knew nothing of what was going on and they were accused of "having participated in assaults on the regiments." The curious fact is that in the middle of these accusations and charges everyone said, "we only heard shots, but we have not seen anyone shoot anyone and no one has shot back." The tortures were generalised. Marines would come in. I say marines because they would always identify themselves as such. They would tell us that the "treatment being applied to us was 'Treatment of Prisoners' which they had learned at Las Rocallosas...We are brutal, we have been trained at Rocallosas to do this."

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On Saturday, the 15th, most of the men, with the exception of a few who were left behind, were taken Indian file surrounded by guards to the merchant marine ship Maipo. On the way we passed hundreds of bound and tortured men lying on the ground, and we could see the decks and holds of the Maipo filled with men kneeling and their hands behind their heads. The guards made us spread our legs and lean against the wall, all the while using one finger to keep our balance. We were rudely and vulgarly insulted by the military personnel and told that we would be immediately shot because they could not waste their time with us. They made us go down to a filthy hold without clothes. There were no bathroom

the toilets and no water. At about 1 P.M. we were given to take six of us out, leaving They were later taken to Pisagua.

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We returned on board to ESMERALDA with a numerous and heavily armed guard. We had to walk over hundreds of men and women lying on their stomachs on the pier. Some were kneeling and with their hands behind their heads, some were in groups of five lying down. On top of them and lying across them would be another group of five. In some cases the altitude of this human heap would be as high as five persons, causing the persons on the bottom extreme suffering.

On the main deck of the ESMERALDA, except at the entrances, passages and bridges, there were lines of men one on top of the other; they were asking for water, crying, complaining of being tired, hungry, in pain. The same midshipman who belonged to Patria y Libertad and who hit me when I first went on board, made me lie on top of some construction workers who were accused of having participated in the shooting that had taken place the night before. We were there for a short while because our destiny was different than that of the other detainees. The one who was in charge of us, took us back to our cell, the midshipmen's quarters. As we got back the "Bird of Torture" who was at the bottom of the stairs told us, "ungrateful men, you left without saying good-bye." And the blows started again. I answered, "you have no idea how delighted we are to get back. We are already acquainted with your hand and everything here. Everything was unknown to us there."

The first day I was excessively hit because among my documents, the personal ones, I had photos of my two sons in military uniforms and with machine guns in their hands. They insisted that my sons were "guerrilleros" (engaged in guerrilla warfare) and that I had to tell them where they were so that they could locate the guerrillas. But my sons were in Israel and were soldiers there; the pictures were the ones that all young people send their parents.

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On September the 16th, dirty, unshaven and permanently wet, tied up and with my eyes covered as usual, I was taken to make a declaration. One of the "inspectors", I am convinced, was a lawyer by the way in which he expressed himself and because of the things he asked me. They had happened many years ago and only

one of my friends. He told me, among many other things, in order to show me how well informed he and the A-2 were about me, about old professional activities of mine. "Your case is a very difficult one. Your boss' safe has been opened after he was killed machine gun in hand, at the Ministry of the Interior. We have found proof that the Government via the Ministry of the Interior and its Communist lawyers were preparing a Plan Djakarta (he pronounced it that way) for September the 19th and in that Plan it stipulates that you were given \$10,000 and 900 machine guns and dynamite. You are the leader of a GAP of 900 men; we have here one of your men who confessed everything." I answered that if he realized the extent of what he was saying, "first the Djakarta Plan has never existed, because Mr. Daniel Vergara, Under Secretary of the Interior, is a serious lawyer; he is responsible and only preoccupied with his ministerial functions. For two years he has not issued a decree to pay my fees as Public Defender of the Government, so how could he hand me \$10,000? As far as security I used to work with people from A-2 exclusively in matters related to investigations of terrorist groups acting against public order and against the Popular Unity Government. The Government House (Intendencia) and its security was organized by Admiral Jose Toribio Merino in May of 1972 when he was Governor of Valparaiso. There are only 10 policemen, one captain, one lieutenant and two detectives at the Government House. This is all the security force and nothing else." He added that I had been at meetings of the GAP in May 1972. I acknowledged that fact. I had attended that meeting accompanying Merino and the person in charge of the First Naval Zone. We both attended that meeting of civilians. Don Juan Bustos, Prefect of Investigations, was at that meeting as well as members of the Investigation Bureau, Police Forces and presumably some GAP members, but I did not know them. The one who talked on behalf of the government was Admiral Merino; I did nothing else than accompany him.

The next day I was taken to the quarter deck. I realized that there was only one person there. As soon as I arrived, he hit me on the kidneys and gave me a couple of karate blows with his feet on my thighs, stomach, and arms. He stepped on my insteps and he gave me the "telephone". I was tied up to the steel

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produces unbearable pain. He asked me concrete questions about my connections with Officers of the Navy, Police Force and Army and what connections they had with the Popular Unity Government and with the political parties that formed the Government. He also asked me about the information I had been given about the Armed Forces. He would hit me and ask, "will you be able to recognize my hands?" I would answer, "Officer, Sir, my eyes are covered, I cannot hear with all this cloth around me and with the blows, besides one hand hits as well as any other; all hands hit alike." As far as all the officers about whom he questioned me, from Admirals to Lieutenants and other officers in different branches, my connections with them had been entirely and exclusively of a professional nature and their behavior was strictly professional. With many of them it never went beyond a greeting when I went to Jose Toribio Merino's office. I visited his office on account of matters dealing with the Governorships, the Corporation of Development, and the Industry and Medical Machinery Company of Valparaiso.

I could not accept any charges, they were infantile.

I remember that during all that time and in the Officers Quarters, they constantly hit Councilmanon his heart. The situation was of indescribable chaos. They made different charges, then they would get confused as to the charges made. They accused the women of belonging to guerrilla groups, of being nurses in war hospitals; everywhere there were lamentations, everything was violent, fear and terror. I have seen my friends arrive covered with urine and defecation. I have seen and heard ladies who had their period, forced to take their clothes off and put under water in spite of their protests. I have seen, because I could see from my hammock, when my back was turned, how an Italian citizen called was savagely beaten. I have seen and heard my friend, a sick man, cry out in pain. He was detained and taken from his bed where he lay sick, thus risking his life. I have seen how a friend of mine, completely removed from any political activity and seriously ill, was beaten. I have seen how people in the Midshipmen's Quarters were driven insane. (This happened to a young man with a Yugoslavian last name.) I saw Venezuelans, Bolivians, Peruvians, Uruguayans and Argentinians students of Catholic University

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their hair grotesquely cut with commando knives. I was beaten by the torturers so they could show those young students how brave we Chileans were and how we no longer complained.

On September the 18th we were not questioned, but we were hit as we were every other day. That day one of the torturers put on a baseball glove so that "it makes a noise, but it won't hurt." This was the maximum concession to us.

On September 19th I was again taken to the Quarter deck, but this time the man, who had applied the electric shocks to me, and who was interested in the Officers of the Navy and other Defense Branches was not alone. Other voices could be heard. As soon as I arrived he asked me, "can you smell shit?" A comrade of yours has just defecated with the electric shock." I answered, "I can hardly breath with the bandages, I can't smell anything." The man told me, "boy you are lucky you son of a bitch, I can't stand the stink anymore." And he started telling me, "You have lied to me all along dear Luis, you have screwed all of those who have interrogated you. You have laughed at me, you think you are tough, but now you are going to face me." I was naked, with my eyes covered and with my hands tied behind my back. He loosened my hands and handcuffed me to the pillar. He told me, "I know you used to practice karate, now we are going to find out what your physical condition is." He hit me on the stomach, on the liver and on my shoulders. He told me he had a "hammer" blow (upside down) that no one could resist. And he applied it on each shoulder. He completely paralyzed my two arms. But I did not complain. This was the same man who had tortured me by himself. I could recognize his voice, his blows, the alcohol on his breath, it was an unbearable smell of hard liquor. I will never forget these feelings. He asked me if I hurt. I don't know why I told him that he had not hurt me, not as much as when one hurts oneself when practicing karate on the Dome.

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I know who he is. He is one meter seventy high. He is heavy set with big hands, fair haired with a touch of copper, ugly looking with unrefined features and very muscular. He is a Navy captain.

Once again he accused me of dealings with GAP. He told me

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he had other detainees who had confessed to being part of my GAP and that they had stated they had received machine guns, dynamite and money from me and that I had, also, trained them. I demanded that he face me with them. A while earlier he had presented as a witness a young man, rather simple, 19 years old who had worked as a messenger boy at the Government Building in Valparaiso and who later on worked in a Factory of Safety Gloves. And this was the boy they (the GAP) had as second in command. I told him that I was an adult, a grandfather and that had I gotten involved in any such matters, e. g. 900 men armed with machine guns, ammunition, and plenty of money, I would not have appointed such a simpleton as second in command. If any such thing could have happened I could have faced the two thousand sailors, the eight hundred marines, the seven hundred policemen and the seven hundred soldiers that the Province of Valparaiso had, because the supposed weapon availability was superior to theirs. But I was a man of Law and that my activities were in the 596 cases in the Appellate Court and in the Military, Naval and Police Fiscal Offices.

It was I, petitioned by Jose Toribio Merino, who brought forth an accusation before the same Jose Toribio Merino as Judge of the First Naval Zone, of some sailors who were accused in July of 1973 of subversive activities.

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This "inspector" accused me, between blows, of receiving an order from Allende to kill Admiral Merino and all the Navy, Army, Aviation and Police Officers in the rooms of the Government Building. This was to take place during a cocktail party that was to be given in honor of the Armed Forces. I was to give the order so that the terrorists, the suicidal communists laden with explosives would infiltrate the troops and blow them up while some other of my men would shoot machine guns at the surviving men and thus demoralize them. The shooting was to take place from the roofs of the adjacent buildings. These instructions, according to the documents found in Daniel Vergara's safe, had been given by Salvador Allende himself. And that according to Plan Djakarta, this was to take place in every Province; the lawyers at the Ministry of the Interior leading in the massacre of officers and troops. I expressed to him that in front of Ad-

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Allende had given me specific instructions. The date was the 21st of May 1972. Allende had especially made a trip from Santiago in order to give tribute to the Chilean Navy at the Arturo Prat monument. His specific instructions were: "You will be counsel to Admiral Jose Toribio Merino, Acting Governor, you will obey and follow his instructions as if he were I and in the event of a contradictory position between a civil authority and Admiral Merino, you will take his side. And if when I nominate a permanent Governor, there may be a problem either with Admiral Merino or any other Admiral who might be in charge as a Commander of the First Naval Zone, you will back Admiral Merino, because he will always act dispassionately on the side that is fair and just." I did so. I even went further and made my judicial statements against those of the Naval Auditors in October 1972 when he was in charge of the Emergency Zone. I recognized his attributes over the ones of the Governor of the Province.

This "inspector" stated that I was lying and that I only intended to defend "Allende the traitor, that I was also a traitor and that I could not fool him." He decided to apply the electric shock again. Now he had helpers. He wanted me to confess and sign a confession. At that particular moment another officer came in and told him that it was unnecessary to apply the electric shock to me because there were different orders connected with me. And this new officer reiterated a proposition that had been made to me before: to cooperate by informing against my comrades and that I would then be able to continue as a Civil Servant and process those who were acting against the Nation's Security. This because I was only a Civil Servant and not a political leader. I expressed again that I was a man of law and a Civil Servant, but that I always acted according to my conscience and that my conscience told me to continue living as I always had.

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Then the "inspector" told me, "talk". I asked him "what do you want me to talk about?" He said "give the reasons why so and so were appointed for such and such a job, tell us about the problems Admiral so and so had with the UP. And about officers in the other branches of the Armed Forces in National

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detained. I spoke about 35 or 50 minutes. Then at a specific moment the "inspector" told me, "you know what my dear Luis, you have tangled me up and confused me more than spaghetti are tangled in a spaghetti meal, you better get back to your hammock." They took me again to the Midshipmen's Quarters. We could not rest there, during the 24 hours tortured men and women would come in and go out.

A Customs Civil Servant, was tortured on board the ESMERALDA. This caused such effects that he committed suicide after a beating of tortures. He jumped over board and drowned.

It was dawn of September 20th, 1973. I lay on my back with my hands under my head, when at about three I was told that I had to get dressed, shaved, and take my few belongings. Everything was returned to me, except the identity card, drivers license, Ministry of Interior Identification and my gold chain. ... and ... and ... and ... and ... and myself were removed in one of the Naval Academy mini buses, at approximately 4:45 with an incredibly large guard. In the bus a sargeant who was camouflaged told us, "we have orders against you in case you talk or move." That was the last time that I saw the ESMERALDA. Up to September the 10th it had been for me and for 10,000,000 Chileans, the White Lady, The National Pride. It represented Chilean democracy, manhood, the chivalry of Chilean officers and sailors. Today it is a Torture Chamber, A Flagellation Chamber, A Floating Jail of Horror, Death, and Fear to Chilean men and women under the hands of soldiers and officers who are not Chilean, but belong to an Occupation Army that is an enemy of Chile.

And even if this is subjective, I feel that it is imperative to tell what the ESMERALDA is really like because of the many Chileans who were tortured there. This is what it has been turned into by officers of the High Command of the Navy who with the other branches of the Armed Forces plotted against Chilean freedom, democracy and constitutionality.

From there we were taken to Quintero; the Air Force group 10 was on a plane to Dawson Island. My testimony refers to the ten days that I was a prisoner in the Midshipmen Quarters.

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and where I was tortured on the quarter deck and in other
Chambers of the ESMERALDA.

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Signed: Luis Vega

identity card ☒ Valparaíso
Ex-prisoner on board the ESMERALDA
and of the concentration camps of
Compingín, Dawson Island, Puchuncaví,
Ritoque and Tres Alamos in Chile

124

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